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Executive Director of Arts Commission Robert Booker Receives 2006 Gary Young Award for Leadership in the Arts

(Phoenix, Ariz.) – The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) announced today that Robert “Bob” Booker, executive director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts (ACA), is the 2006 recipient of the Gary Young Award. This award is presented annually to an executive director of a state arts agency or regional arts organization.

This year’s Gary Young Award recognizes Booker for his inspirational leadership at the state, regional, and national levels, his dedication to the artistic community, and his commitment to nurturing creativity in the next generation of arts leaders. Governor Janet Napolitano was not surprised at the announcement of the award. “Bob is a dynamic arts leader who not only believes that the arts are for everyone, but is committed to making it happen.”

Booker began his career as an intern at the South Dakota Arts Council under the tutelage of Charlotte Carver and Dennis Holub. He joined the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB) in 1985 as a program officer, served as deputy director from 1990 to 1996, and was selected to head the agency in 1997. Notable among Booker’s numerous accomplishments in Minnesota were his efforts to build and sustain partnerships. He understood and invested in the power of collaboration to maximize organizational achievement.

Booker was one of the field’s cultural tourism “pioneers.” He and a handful of representatives from other state agencies came together in 1996 to create the “Explore Minnesota” store at the Mall of America—the first statewide one-stop information center for arts, cultural, historical and recreational information. That cultural tourism partnership has expanded to include promotion of arts and cultural amenities along Minnesota’s scenic byways, and other cooperative efforts to promote cultural heritage tourism in Minnesota. Dennis Holub says of Bob’s tenure at the MSAB that “The work he did for the State of Minnesota was exemplary. There are many programs for which he can be credited with starting or expanding.”

In June 2005, Booker received the Minnesota Crafts Council's Lifetime Achievement Award. Two months later, Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty proclaimed August 15, 2005, as Bob. Booker Day in Minnesota, recognizing Booker for his leadership on the Governor's Residence Council—where he served under four Minnesota governors.

Booker has been an engaged and active leader at the regional and national level. He served on the board of Arts Midwest from 1997-2004, where he was a tireless advocate for regional, national, and international exchanges. Booker has been a board member of the National Assembly of State Arts Agency (NASAA) since 1999, serving as its president in 2004 and 2005—promoting and representing state arts agency interests to Congress, the National Endowment for the Arts and the field. He has served on a variety of state arts agency panels across the country as well as panels for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Booker began his tenure as executive director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts in January 2006, replacing the recently retired Shelley Cohn. According to Cohn, Bob “jumped right in to acquaint himself with new constituents and stakeholders, including the legislature. One of Bob’s passions is finding appropriate leadership roles for young and emerging staff. People in Arizona have immediately reached out to him and him to them, in keeping with his open and gregarious style.” During this year’s legislative session the Arts Commission received an appropriation of \$7million dollars to complete the ArtShare endowment. ArtShare is a statewide fund that supports the stabilization of arts organizations, arts education, and cultural tourism.

Joan Mondale, arts advocate and wife of former Vice President Walter Mondale, says that Booker’s track record speaks for itself: “He is qualified, experienced, and has proven his ability to expand the arts.”

The Arizona Commission on the Arts connects artists and communities.

[PHOTO AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.]

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